

A Game for Life  
Golf's Rules and Rewards

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° PART ONE

*Embracing the Spirit of the  
Rules—Both Written and  
Unwritten*

**The Good Golfer**

**W**HAT'S A "GOOD" GOLFER? HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE it? Is it someone who simply shoots low scores, or somebody who plays the game the right way? For me, it's someone who practices good etiquette, someone who's fun to be around, for whom pace of play is not a challenge and someone who's a pleasure to be with on the golf course; that's my definition of a good golfer.

You can be a fun golf partner for anyone. Even very good players are happy to play with an average player if that person is ready to play; knows where to stand; plays by the Rules; doesn't need repeated help finding his ball and, most important, doesn't cry about playing poorly.

My definition of a good golfer is a person who enjoys the game for all the wonderful things it gives us in return.

Companionship, competition and exercise come quickly to mind. But the game also gives us a perfect excuse for a walk in the park and the perfect opportunity to enjoy a beautiful spring morning or a peaceful autumn afternoon. And, we never tire of, or conquer, the challenges presented by the architect, the course superintendent and Mother Nature.

As we wade into a new century we should all be mindful of golf's wonderful traditions and the joy we extract from the game and its environment so that we can pass the game along—intact—to those who will carry it to new heights in the twenty-first century. So, while other sports applaud, if not honor, obnoxious behavior by its stars—behavior mimicked and even “refined” by its rookies—as golf *veterans*, we must accept the position of role models as we introduce the game to our children and grandchildren and welcome newcomers to the game.

In that spirit, the next time you tee it up with a new member or get paired with a beginner, make it a playing lesson. Help them to understand that golf is an examination of the whole person, every facet of human development—physical, intellectual, behavioral and emotional. Golf is not just a long-drive contest where the prize goes to the one with the biggest biceps

or even the best hand-eye coordination. It's much more than that. It's a test of our intellect, but it goes way beyond electing strategy or calculating the effects of the wind, the firmness of the turf, the texture of the sand and the slope of the greens. It demonstrates our ability to get along with people—friends and strangers alike—and how to adjust to changing conditions and personalities. Golf is one of the few games where self-reporting of violations is common and success is based on your character and your ability to control your emotions. Pumping adrenalin is seldom an asset and a desire to retaliate against an opponent almost always works against your goals.

In most other major sports, etiquette, if there is any, is a custom. Not so in golf, where etiquette and good fellowship are an elemental part of the game. In fact, Section I of the *Rules of Golf* deals exclusively with etiquette. Think about your favorite golfing companions, those you probably consider “successful golfers.” They are almost always the ones who are mindful and respectful of others on the course and, out of consideration for other players, do not hit when someone is within range, or move or talk, stand too close or directly behind the ball or the hole when a player is addressing his ball or making a stroke. Successful golfers also

care for the course by smoothing holes and footprints in the bunkers and replacing divots, fixing ball marks and taking care that those who follow will have the same, or better, conditions than they had.

We encourage newcomers, especially the young, to take advantage of the many “teaching moments.” We explain, for example, the value of dressing for success, as their next pairing might very well include a future employer! And we should always be aware that, as their role models, if we don’t pass along what has made us successful golfers, they will not enjoy all the rewards the game has to offer.

Golf is the perfect game for the twenty-first century—a test of the whole person. Talent will always win tournaments and, while the purely physical test, the ability to belt the ball a mile, will have an important place, it will never define the successful golfer. It takes a whole lot more.



### **A Remarkable, Fluid Document**

There may exist among some a perception that the Rules are impenetrable, inflexible, and that they are meant to be that way—designed, or at least written, to confuse, confound

and frustrate golfers. Nothing could be further from the truth. Were this the case, to pick an extreme example, we might still be teeing up our drives a club length from the hole just completed, as was once the norm. Or, to take relief, we might still be required to stand erect, face the hole and drop the ball over the shoulder, as rules prescribed before 1984. The conventions of golf continue to evolve as befits a game of near infinite variety and change. The Rules could hardly be said to be a “closed book” at all.

The *Rules of Golf* is a remarkable, fluid document that is regularly appraised, discussed and debated, and when warranted, altered and amended. I mention this only to highlight the extraordinary relationship and spirit of cooperation that exists between the United States Golf Association (USGA) and the Royal and Ancient (R&A) in Scotland. It was 1952, when the first uniform code of Rules was written by their combined genius. Since then the Rules have been updated every four years—an enviable record of collaboration. To their credit, on behalf of the greater good of the game, the USGA and R&A have never shown reluctance to sit down and talk over their concerns, to, as they say, “take a meeting.”



## **The Rules Book: Your 15th Club...and How to Use It**

*The Rules of Golf are too complex!*

*I can never find anything in the Rules book!*

*Why do the Rules have to be so confusing?*

You've heard these laments many times, and have perhaps uttered them yourself, which is curious when you consider that the Rules of Golf actually started out pretty simply: (1) Play the course as you find it; (2) Play your ball as it lays; (3) If you can't do either, do what's fair.

The Rules are more complex today than in the past. And necessarily so. There were no golf carts, cart paths, ball washers, bunker rakes, irrigation boxes and yardage markers in golf's early years. But I, for one, still find the Rules of Golf to be a monument to logic that strives to be consistent and fair.

In other sports, we rely on "experts" to make the calls on what's fair. In golf, we're usually our own referee—and frustration arrives when we can't find the applicable Rules quickly. Why? It's simply a matter of taking the time to learn how to use the Rules book.



The very nature of this great outdoor sport makes the Rules complex, and the desire to keep the book pocket size requires a concisely written document. So, don't waste your time trying to memorize the Rules. Just learn how to use the book.

Here are some steps to help:

**Step One: Speak the language of golf.** Know the definitions of the basic golf vocabulary. Everyone knows what a sand trap, a lake or a pin is, right? But when a ball is lost in that trap or lake, or when a putt strikes an unattended pin, you'll be hard-pressed to find the applicable Rule unless you use the terms *bunker*, *water hazard* and *flagstick*.

Some of golf's language may seem outdated (or charming, depending on your point of view), but "talking the talk" is critical. Most players are familiar enough with the terms *match play* and *stroke play* to know that the Rules vary according to the "forms of play." They know that major infractions are handled with a loss of a hole in match play, or a two stroke penalty in stroke play. Notice that the correct term is *stroke play*. The term *medal play* is used regularly, but you wouldn't find a reference to it in the Rules book.

Even match play and stroke play have sub-species. Was it *singles* or *four-ball*? We all know that singles match play means

a player against an *opponent*. There are no *opponents* in stroke play: each player competes in a “field” of “competitors.”

Four-ball is not as well understood and is often confused with *best ball* or *best ball of four*. In golf-speak, a four-ball match pits a team (or *side*) of two players who play their better ball against the better ball of two other players. *Best-ball* is different. It pits a single player against the better ball of two or the best ball of three opponents. *Best ball of four* is exactly what the name implies.

The term *foursome* may be the most misused in golf. Our game is traditionally played in “groups” of two, three or four. A *group of four* does not, according to the Rules, mean the same thing as foursome. Foursome is a form of play in which a side (team) is made up of two players and the side plays only *one ball* with the partners playing strokes alternately during the play of each hole.

Understanding the different *forms of play* is mandatory if you want to learn and understand the Rules. So are the definitions.

The Rules book is divided into three sections. Section I deals with Etiquette, Section II with Definitions, and Section III with the Rules of Play. Just as before you play golf, you

should first appreciate and know the etiquette of the game, before you try to apply the Rules of play, you must appreciate, know and master its definitions.

What's the difference between a *caddie* and a *forecaddie*; a *water hazard* and a *lateral water hazard*? When is a ball *holed*, when has it *moved*, and what constitutes a *stroke*? The answers to these and many other potentially misleading terms are found in the 13 pages of definitions near the front of every Rules book.

Take the time to learn and understand the definitions. You'll be amazed how many answers to tricky questions are found right there.

**Step Two: Establish all the facts before you go to the book.** Where did the incident occur? From a Rules perspective, every course is divided into four distinct areas: *teeing grounds*, *putting greens* and *hazards* (bunkers and water hazards) should all sound familiar. The rest of the course is properly referred to as *through the green*. The answer to most Rules questions often depends on *where* (which part of the course) the incident occurred. Next, consider *who* was involved. It usually involves the player and sometimes his or her caddie, but at times it may involve the player's partner or

*his* caddie, or perhaps his opponent, a fellow competitor or an *outside agency* might have been involved as well?

**Step Three: Use the Table of Contents and Index.**

Don't frustrate yourself by aimlessly flipping through the pages. The Table of Contents shows how the Rules are organized. A look at the captions under each Rule lists the items covered and the order in which they are discussed. You'll often be able to find the relevant Rules simply by referring to the Table of Contents. If you still can't find what you are looking for, your next step should be a trip to the Index.

Consider the Rules book your 15th club. It's a great advantage, but only if you know how to use it. As an example, let's say your ball is accidentally kicked and moved during a search. First, establish all the facts. Where did it happen? Through the green? In a hazard? Who kicked the ball? The player himself? His caddie? What form of play? Match play? Stroke play? Four-ball?

Now, using these key phrases, go to the book's Table of Contents, where we'll find the section "Ball Moved, Deflected or Stopped." The sub-captions offer two choices: Ball at Rest Moved or Ball in Motion, Stopped or Deflected. Your choice should be obvious and you'll be directed to page

75, where you'll find Rule 18 (Ball at Rest Moved). Some of the choices you'll find are:

- Rule 18-1 By an Outside Agency
- Rule 18-2 By Player, Partner, Caddie or Equipment
- Rule 18-3 By Opponent, Caddie or Equipment in Match Play
- Rule 18-4 By Fellow Competitor, Caddie, or Equipment in Stroke Play
- Rules 18-5 By Another Ball

If everyone involved agreed that the ball was moved by *your caddie through the green in match play*, you'd simply read Rule 18-2 and learn that you incurred a one-stroke penalty and are required to replace your ball. You could have found the same ruling through the Index, by using similar key words and phrases.

Here's another example: After a heavy rainstorm your opponent's ball lies on dry ground but in a divot hole. In order to play his stroke, he has to stand in a wet area. There is no visible water before he takes his stance, but when he addresses the ball, a little water surfaces around the edge of his shoes. He claims he is entitled to relief, but you're not so sure.

Let's establish the facts. The incident occurred *through the green* and involves only the *player* himself. This time, go to the Index. What is the key word or phrase? You might think of choosing *casual water* or *stance*—either one will lead you to the correct ruling. If you went to “casual water,” you'll be referred to Rule 25. If you went to “stance” you'll be presented with seven choices. Choice number five reads: “Interference with (your stance by) Casual Water, Ground Under Repair, etc.” and refers you to Rule 25-1a.

Casual water is defined as “any temporary accumulation of water (outside of a water hazard) that is *visible* before or after a player takes his stance.” Rule 25 says that a player has interference even if the ball is dry and the casual water interferes only with his stance. Your opponent is entitled to relief.

One final situation: Let's say your birdie putt stops on the lip of the hole, but you know it will fall if you wait long enough. You stare and swear and the ball finally falls—but it takes almost a *minute*. What's your score for the hole?

Although you can get to every Rule through either the Table of Contents or the Index, you'll often find that, depending on the question, one is easier than the other. For

this question you're better off using the Index where any one of several key phrases—"Ball," "Holed" and "Putting Green"—will all lead you to Rule 16-2 (Ball Overhanging Hole). Once you read the Rules, you'll know the ruling and you'll know that you have made a par! These examples will be discussed later.

So, let's review the procedure for using the Rules book. Study the definitions so you can speak the language of the game. Establish *who* was involved, *where* it happened and the *form of play*. Then, using key words or phrases, go to the Table of Contents or the Index to look up the Rule.

But before you do anything, buy a copy of the *Rules of Golf* and carry it in your bag and learn how to use it. This will enable you to settle almost any common Rules question. But, when something unusual happens, such as if the ball gets stuck in the flag, or if the flagstick hits the ball, you'll need to go the *Decisions on the Rules of Golf*.

Each year the USGA and the R&A receive thousands of phone calls, emails and letters requesting clarification on the Rules of Golf. To help players understand how Rules should be applied and interpreted, the USGA and R&A developed another comprehensive book called *Decisions on the Rules of*

*Golf*. Etiquette, definitions and Rules of Play are discussed at length.

Since 1951, the USGA and the R&A have been meeting regularly to establish a uniform code of Rules. *Decisions on the Rules of Golf* is the result of these meetings. Each year, however, brings another round of questions not addressed in the book. Committees meet to discuss these new questions—anything from points of relief from water hazards to playing near a dead snake—and arrive at a decision for each situation. The book is amended every two years.

A *decision* on the Rules has the same status as a Rule and is referenced in *Decisions on the Rules of Golf* by using key words or phrases and a detailed index—the same way you would look up a Rule in the *Rules of Golf*.

As an example, try looking up a few unusual situations involving the flagstick. Unbelievably, there are over 40 decisions under the heading “Flagstick,” broken down as subtitles to help you quickly narrow your search. Here are a few examples of situations that really happened, accessed directly from the index:

**Question:** A player’s ball lodges in the flag attached to a flagstick. What is the procedure? **Answer:** A flagstick



is a movable obstruction and Rule 24-1 applies. Without penalty, the ball may be placed on the lip of the hole (Decision 17/6).

**Question:** A player played a stroke from the putting green. The ball struck the hole-liner, which had stuck to the bottom of the flagstick and had come out of the hole when the person attending the flagstick removed the flagstick. Is there a penalty? **Answer:** No. A hole-liner is an outside agency. Accordingly, if the hole-liner was moving when the ball struck it, the stroke is cancelled and the ball must be replaced—Rule 19-1b. If the hole-liner was not moving, the ball must be played as it lies—Rule 19-1. In case of doubt, the ball must be played as it lies (Decision 17/8).

**Question:** A player holds the flagstick with one hand and holes a short putt, gripping the putter with his other hand. Is this permissible? **Answer:** Yes, provided that the flagstick has been removed from the hole and the ball therefore does not strike it. If the ball were to strike the flagstick, a breach of Rule 17/3a would occur (Decision 17-1/5).

You can obtain a copy of the *Decisions on the Rules of Golf* by contacting the Order Department at the USGA

(908-234-2300), or on the USGA Website ([www.usga.org](http://www.usga.org)). It makes for interesting reading and you'll find thousands of case studies.



### **On Correcting Mistakes**

Back in the 50's, when Ted Williams and Sam Snead were dominant players, a reporter asked them to compare the difficulty of their respective sports. Williams pointed out that in baseball you use a round bat to hit a round ball traveling close to 100 miles per hour, a ball that sometimes curves, sometimes knuckles and sometimes comes at your head. Snead nodded and said, "Yeah, Ted, but in golf we have to play our foul balls!"

Not all the time. Every golfer has undoubtedly done something on the golf course that he wished he could immediately undo. While some accidents may end up costing you embarrassment, a stroke, or even disqualification, there are times when having a working knowledge of the Rules may save you, because at least some of your mistakes can be corrected—some without penalty.

How many times have you inadvertently knocked your ball off the tee, only to hear someone in your group shout: “That’s one!” Well, it’s not one. On the teeing ground you are not penalized for accidentally moving your ball, even with a practice swing, unless you’ve already put the ball *into play* on that hole. Here’s where a knowledge of the *Definitions* can really be important.

According to the Rules, a ball is considered to be *in play* only after a player has made a stroke on the teeing ground. A *stroke* is the forward movement of the club made with the *intention* of fairly striking and moving the ball. So, if you *accidentally* move the ball as the result of a practice swing or a nervous twitch, the ball may be replaced without penalty. Don’t be lulled into a false sense of security, however: other than on the teeing ground, if you accidentally move your ball in this manner, you must accept a one-stroke penalty and you must replace the ball.

When you drop a ball in the wrong place, or use the wrong dropping technique, or allow another person to drop it for you—all no-nos—you’re allowed to correct your mistake without penalty, as long as you correct it before you

play your next stroke. The penalties vary if you fail to correct it. The penalty is one stroke if you drop it improperly or have someone else drop it for you, but two strokes if you drop *and play* from the wrong place.

If, in the normal course of play, you damage a club to an extent that it no longer conforms to the Rules, you may replace the club. The same holds true if you arrive at the course with less than the allowable 14 clubs—and there is no penalty, unless you delay play replacing the damaged or missing club.

It is the player's responsibility to turn in an accurate hole-by-hole score. Adding your score correctly, however, is the committee's job. So, it's no problem if you record a wrong score on your card, as long as you correct the error before you return it to the committee. And, even if you were to turn your card in with an addition error, there is no penalty as long as your hole-by-hole scores are correct.

If you accidentally move your opponent's ball or a ball belonging to a fellow competitor while helping in the search for a lost ball, there is no penalty, but the ball must be replaced. Seems only fair, doesn't it? Who would help look otherwise?

If you find yourself confronted with fire ants or in a *dangerous situation* such as a bunker filled with bees, you don't have to risk injury to play the ball. You may, without penalty, drop a ball in the nearest spot that isn't dangerous—but not nearer to the hole. There is one catch, however. If the ball lies in a hazard (which includes a bunker), you must drop the ball in a hazard—and in the same one, if possible. If dropping the ball in the same hazard is not possible, you must drop in a similar, nearby hazard. But in both cases, you can't drop the ball nearer to the hole.

So, use your head, learn the Rules and remember what Yogi Berra said: “90% of the game is half-mental.”



### **Swinging at Mushrooms and Other Rules Conundrums**

In what must appear to be the very serious world of the Rules of Golf, there are more humorous incidents than one might believe. Of course, the humor comes only when the incident is re-created, and it is almost always the “victim” who enjoys the retelling the most.

Take, for instance, the guy who thought he had found his ball buried in *the rough*. After a lengthy pre-shot

routine—which included a discussion on wind direction and velocity and a club change—his mighty swing resulted in the explosion of a “ball-shaped” mushroom. As if the embarrassment of mistaking a mushroom for a ball wasn’t enough, his opponent sprinkled salt on the wound by insisting that since his “intent” was to hit a ball he should lose the hole for playing a *wrong ball*. There was no penalty.

What about the woman who *was* penalized for a lost ball while in the process of taking a *free* drop from ground under repair. This case took place before the rule regarding the dropping procedure had changed. Some may recall that prior to 1984, a drop was properly executed by standing erect, facing the hole and dropping the ball over your shoulder. The woman followed the procedure to the letter, but when she turned to check her lie, she couldn’t find her ball. Her entire group joined the futile search before concluding that she had to proceed under the lost ball rule.

The mystery wasn’t solved until the woman stopped by the golf shop to tell her tale to a golf professional. As she demonstrated the drop, the pro noticed that she was wearing a hooded windbreaker. “Elementary, Mrs. Watson,” the pro

proclaimed, as he pulled the ball out of her hood. “The ball never touched the ground.”

An incident whose details can only improve with age occurred at the Apawamis Club in Rye, New York, at a United States Senior Golf Association Championship. A roving rules official observed two competitors engaged in an animated discussion on the apron of the ninth green. A ball had landed on a wad of bubble gum and, when it came to rest, the gum was securely attached. The player felt that he should be entitled to remove the gum, but a fellow competitor insisted that he was not allowed to “clean” the ball until it was on the green.

The answer? Chewing gum is artificial and therefore is defined as an *obstruction* and, given its size and weight, it would further be classified as a *movable* obstruction. Anywhere on the course, relief from interference by movable obstructions such as paper cups or soda cans is gained by *moving the obstruction*. However, if the ball lies in or on the obstruction, the ball may be lifted and cleaned without penalty.

This is very different from having a *loose impediment*—natural things such as leaves, sand or mud—adhere to your

ball. If a loose impediment adheres to your ball, you are not permitted to remove it until it comes to rest on the putting green.

Finally, a chuckle came via a phone call on a cool November morning. “What temperature does it have to be to play winter rules?”



### **Order of Play**

For many of us, our first lesson on the Rules of Golf may have occurred before our very first shot. I can still remember walking up to the first tee on caddie day, only to be told, “Hold it right there, you don’t have the honor.”

Rule 10 (Order of Play) seems pretty straightforward, but violations can be awkward and some may remember an international “incident” that occurred during a Solheim Cup match in 2000 when Annika Sorenstam chipped in for birdie—before her opponent had attempted her long birdie putt—then was challenged as to whether it had been her turn to play. The incident? Some felt her opponent was guilty of poor sportsmanship for standing by while Sorenstam played out of turn, then speaking up *to cancel her shot only after* her



great chip. According to the Rules, however, her opponent was correct in doing so.

Here's the way Rule 10 reads: "The player to play first is said to have the 'honor.'" The honor on the first tee is determined by a draw. In the absence of a draw the honor should be determined by lot—as through flipping a coin or tee.

The side that wins a hole in match play or has the lowest score in stroke play shall take the honor at the next teeing ground. If a hole has been halved or stroke play competitors have the same score, they should play from the tee in the same order as on the previous teeing ground.

When the balls are *in play*, the ball farthest from the hole shall be played first. If the balls are equidistant from the hole, the order of play shall be determined by lot.

Balls belonging to the same side may be played in the order the side considers best (Rule 30-3c).

As basic as this Rule may seem in writing, it often causes problems, particularly with different formats and types of events. Here are some examples and common questions:

If Player A is on the green 40 feet from the hole and Player B is in a bunker but only 30 feet from the hole, who has the honor? Player A. It makes no difference whether a ball is on

the green or not, the player whose ball is farthest from the hole has the honor.

Players A and B are both on the green and their balls appear to be the exact same distance from the hole. How do you determine the honor? It really doesn't happen often, but during the 2000 U.S. Amateur at Baltusrol Jerry Courville, Jr., and James Driscoll *both* hit balls to within 18 to 20 feet of the hole. Veteran Rules Official Joe Cantwell was the referee and could not determine the honor by eye so he pulled out a spool of string to measure the distances. It turned out that they were equidistant. He then reached into his pocket for a coin but discovered he did not have one so he borrowed a coin from one of the players and flipped it to determine the honor. This may seem like an odd procedure, but Mr. Cantwell had proceeded "by the book."

Who plays first when both players lift their balls to take relief from *ground under repair* (GUR) or the same water hazard? The honor would go to the player whose ball was farthest from the hole *before* it was lifted from the GUR or retrieved from the water hazard. If two balls are hit into and *lost* in the same water hazard, the honor would be determined by "lot," such as a flip of the coin.

How do you determine the honor in a handicap event? In match play, the winner of the hole has the honor so the *net* score would be used to determine the honor. In stroke play, when the handicap is deducted at the end of the round and not on individual holes, the gross score would be used to determine the honor on the next tee. An exception to this would be four-ball stroke play where the honor would be determined by the low net score.

In four-ball, can you allow your partner to knock in a short putt if you have the honor, even if he's "inside" your opponents? Yes. The side with the honor may play in the order the side considers best.

Can a player choose to putt out rather than mark and lift his ball? Yes and no. In stroke play, it can speed up play so the practice is not discouraged. In match play, there is no such option.

What happens if a player plays out of turn? In stroke play, there is no penalty unless the committee determines that the competitors have agreed to play out of order to give one of them an advantage. In match play, there is no penalty either; however, the opponent may require the player to cancel the stroke and play a ball in correct order, as was the case with Annika.

You can usually avoid needless penalties—and criticism—by being aware of who’s “away” and improve your pace of play by being ready to play when you have the honor.



### Two Different Games

I believe every golfer who makes an effort to learn more about the Rules enjoys the game a little more. An understanding of the Rules brings with it more of an appreciation for the history of golf and a respect for the game’s nuances, its language and its traditions.

All of us in the business of teaching the Rules acknowledge that by design or neglect, accurately or not, golf’s TV announcers impart information about the Rules of Golf to more golfers during one telecast than we’ll impact in a year—maybe a lifetime! Perhaps this is why I hold my breath before every two-man sudden death tour playoff when announcers say, or imply, a common misconception by announcing that “this is match play—this is not medal play!” What they really mean is that the players’ strategy would be *more like match play* since each would now only have one man to beat.

The major difference between match and stroke play is that in match play you play against an opponent and the game is played by holes—which you win, lose or halve—and violations of general rules result in the loss of a hole. In stroke play, the field comprises fellow competitors. The winner has the fewest number of strokes, and violations of the same general rules would result in a two-stroke penalty—but there are other differences:

- If I tee up and play my ball from outside the teeing ground in stroke play, I incur a two-stroke penalty and I must replay the stroke from within the teeing ground (before teeing off on the next hole) or be disqualified (Rule 11). In match play, there is no penalty for the same violation. My opponent, however, would have the option of either letting my stroke count or requiring me to do it all over again, without penalty, but from the right place.
- In stroke play, I am penalized two strokes if my putt strikes another ball lying on the putting green. Once again, in match play there is no penalty, even if my putt strikes my opponent's or partner's ball. However, in order to keep me from using any other ball as a backstop or otherwise gaining an advantage in a match, my opponent(s) could

require me to have any (or all) other balls marked and lifted before I putt—and I must oblige (Rule 22).

- In match play, I can concede my opponent's next stroke, the hole or even the match (Rule 2-4). In stroke play, everyone must “hole out” on every hole or suffer disqualification.
- Unless a referee has been assigned to your match, you—and only you—can *call the hole* or make a *claim* if you notice your opponent breaking a rule. Your claim however, must be made before either you or your opponent tee off on the next hole, or you lose your right to call the hole. In stroke play, there is no such “statute of limitations” until the competition has closed: Anyone, not just a fellow competitor, can bring a violation to the attention of the committee, who can then assess a penalty—which has led to a number of controversial viewer “call-in” penalties and disqualifications.

Match and stroke play are two different games with different Rules. Those who know the differences may enjoy and appreciate the game just a little bit more—and they may have earned a little advantage as well.



## Making Claims

When it comes to calling penalties in match play I often relate it to a two-on-two pick-up basketball game. It's not a foul unless you call it!

In match play, if a dispute arises between the players, a player may make a *claim*, as described earlier. If the claim is immediately lodged directly to a member of the committee, a decision should be made as quickly as possible. If no one on the committee is available, the players must *continue the match without delay*.

According to Rule 2-5, the committee may consider a claim only if the player making the claim notifies his opponent: (i) that he is making a claim; (ii) of the facts of the situation; and (iii) that he wants a ruling. In addition, the claim must be made before any player in the match plays from the next tee or in the case of the last hole of the match, before all players in the match leave the putting green.

Here is an example. While playing the fourth hole, your opponent's ball ends up on an area of "hardpan" just off the fairway. He insists that he is entitled to *free* relief and you

disagree. Since there is no one around to make an immediate ruling, the Rules require you to continue play. So, your opponent takes relief by lifting and dropping his ball—as if the hardpan were *ground under repair*. You are now faced with the decision to accept the fact that he got to move his ball off the bad lie or make a claim.

In order to make a *valid* claim, you must inform your opponent that you are making a claim (speak up). You must spell out what you are claiming (free relief from hardpan in the rough is not permitted) and announce that you'd like the Rules of Golf applied. Simply saying, “that doesn't seem fair” or “are you sure” does not constitute a claim.

In order for the claim to be *timely* you must make it before either of you hit from the fifth tee. So, it's too late to make a valid claim “at the turn” when a friend tells you that you could have “called the hole” or on the back nine, when your opponent denies you relief from a similar condition.

Any later claim should *not* be considered unless it is based on facts you were previously *unaware of* and you had been given wrong information by your opponent. Back to our example. Let's say you were unaware that your opponent took relief from the hardpan because you were off looking



for your own ball. And, when he announced his score for the hole, he did not include a penalty for having moved his ball. If, before the results of the match were officially announced, you became aware that he simply took relief without your knowledge and told you he “made a 3” on the hole you could still make a valid claim.

Once the results of the match have been officially announced, a later claim may not be considered unless the committee is satisfied that your opponent *knew* he was giving you wrong information. By the way, it is the player’s responsibility to know the Rules, and a player is deemed to have given *wrong information* even if it is due to the failure to include a penalty that he did not know that he had incurred.



### **When Rules Stymie....or “Doubt as to Procedure”**

Keeping in mind Yogi Berra’s sage advice, “It ain’t over ’til it’s over,” my comment regarding Ken Venturi’s regular assertions that Arnold Palmer got away with a Rules violation during the 1958 Masters would be: “Ken, it’s over!”

While Venturi agreed that Arnie *should* have been granted relief for an embedded ball behind Augusta’s famed par-3

12th hole, the Rules official did not. According to Ken, after hitting a poor chip shot, Arnie *then* decided to play a second ball. Ken knew you must announce your intention to play a second ball *before* you hit the first and disagreed with the Committee's decision to allow the score with the second ball to count. This saved the "King" two pivotal strokes toward his first "Green Jacket".

Venturi's claim, more than a half-decade after the incident, did bring Rule 3-3 (Doubt as to Procedure) front and center and may be worth a review.

Rule 3-3 is too often confused with a provisional ball (Rule 25-2) that may only be used when you believe your ball might have gone out of bounds or be lost outside a water hazard. Rule 3-3 allows a player who finds himself in a situation where he is unsure of his rights to play a *second ball*.

Given the fact that you will actually have two balls in play simultaneously, there are two very important preconditions that must be met before implementing this "second-ball Rule." First, you must announce your intention to invoke Rule 3-3, and second, you must specify which of the two balls you want to count if the Rules permit.

Here's an example. You hit a perfect drive only to discover that your ball came to rest in a deep tire rut created by a gang mower. You feel you should be entitled to relief but you're not sure which rule applies. Before taking a stroke or lifting the ball to take relief, you must inform a member of your group that you are invoking Rule 3-3 and will play a *second ball*. You must also announce that if the committee determines that you *are* entitled to relief, you want your score with the second ball to count.

It is important to emphasize that these announcements must take place *before* you take any action. You cannot wait and see if you hit a good or bad shot from the original lie. Back to our example... Let's say you miraculously knock your ball onto the green from the rutted lie. At this point, you might be tempted to forget about playing a second ball and simply continue play with your original ball. That would be a mistake. Once you announce your intention to apply Rule 3-3, you must follow through and play out the hole with both balls or risk disqualification.

So, after playing the original ball, you would then drop another ball no closer to the hole and within a club

length of the *nearest point of relief* and play out the hole with both balls.

Let's say you score a par 4 with the original ball, the one you played from the rutted lie, and bogey 5 with the second ball. When your round is complete you would report all the facts to the committee, which would then decide if you should have been entitled to relief.

If they rule that the tire rut constituted *ground under repair*, you would count the score you made with the second ball—the one you took relief with—even though it happened to be the higher score. On the other hand, if the committee decided that you were not entitled to relief, you would count the score you made with your original ball.

One final point: Rule 3-3 logically *cannot* be used in match play since your opponent's strategy, as well as your own, is almost always based on the current state of the match.



### **Member-Guest & Club Competitions: When Rules Tensions Flare**

Although the golf season runs year-round, the volume of Rules questions has its peaks and valleys. One of the peaks comes

around Labor Day when a majority of clubs conducts their annual club championships. The other is July and August, when every club seems to schedule a major member-guest.

While most of us profess to playing U.S. Golf Association rules all the time, we don't always live and play by the letter of the law. This all changes, of course, when the bell rings for the big events of the summer—member-guests and club championships.

I've played in a few of those three-day, round-robin match-play member-guests and although I try to remain anonymous, I occasionally get called on to answer questions on the Rules, sometimes after the fact, often in the clubhouse or from an adjacent fairway.

Here's a sampling of a few situations that have come up:

After playing four holes, one of the players on Team A—which had lost holes one and two, tied the third and lost the fourth—discovered he had started the match with 15 clubs.

**Question One:** The partner with the extra club had played poorly and had not figured in on the result of any hole. Did that relieve the team of the penalty? No, it did not. Rule 30-3e says the *side* shall be penalized for a breach of Rule 4-4 (maximum of 14 clubs) by any partner—so you

may want to check your partner's bag as well as your own on the first tee.

**Question Two:** The players knew the penalty would be the loss of a hole, with a maximum penalty of two holes, but since Team A lost the first and second holes, anyway, in effect there would be no penalty, right? Rule 4-4 reads: "At the conclusion of the hole at which the breach is discovered, the *state of the match* shall be adjusted by deducting one hole for each hole at which the breach occurred. Maximum deduction per round: two holes." As Team A stood three down after four holes, they became five down after four holes, once the penalty was applied!

In the grill after a round, a player asked me how the Rules applied if he played a provisional ball and hit into the same general area as his original tee shot, he finds both, but can't tell one ball from the other. Seasoned players wouldn't think of putting a ball into play without a personal identification mark on it, but weekend players often fail to do this. Actually, this player was not the first to face this situation and there is a relevant decision (Decision 27/11). This is one of the few times a player can take his pick and play either ball—but it will cost him since he lies three, whichever ball he picks.

Our afternoon match was against a team that warned us to watch out when we played the team—and their great caddie—that had just beaten them. It seems the caddie read greens beautifully. Knowing he could not touch the green to point out the line of putt, they had devised a system in which the caddie would tend the flagstick and stand so that his right foot would indicate the line. The system worked like a charm and our opponents were anxious to try it themselves—against us! I told them that Rule 8-2 (Indicating Line of Play) and Decision 8-2b/1 that deals with a caddie using his shadow for the identical purpose, would prevent them from utilizing this “system.”

The talk of the weekend, though, involved the hole location on the 18th. The superintendent had the greens rolling very fast, at close to 11 on the Stimpmeter, and the committee opted to use a front-right hole location. When the greens are at their usual 9.5 speed, this hole location is very challenging. This time, the location was just plain silly. Player after player watched in agony as balls rolled up to the hole, peeked in, then rolled back down the hill. One group actually agreed to a halved hole after all four players had taken four putts each, and no one had holed out!

After viewing the carnage from the 18th fairway, one team decided to test the committee and the Rules. One at a time, they stroked their putts, then followed the ball up the hill and tapped the ball into the hole from short range, just as it began its retreat down the hill—willing to accept a two-stroke penalty under Rule 14-5 (Playing a moving ball). Given the humorous nature of the hole location, their strategy may have been solid—but their knowledge of the Rules was not. A two-stroke penalty would apply only in stroke play. In match play, the penalty is loss of hole, which handed the hole to their bewildered but grateful opponents.



### **Local Rules**

When we tee it up for casual play there is commonly an unspoken agreement to play by USGA Rules. Differing levels of interest in, understanding of and respect for, the Rules result in countless misapplications, disputes, arguments and Rules calls to the USGA.

At every level of competitive golf—from a country club scramble to the U.S. Open—there is a committee responsible



for laying down the conditions under which the competition is to be played.

Some committees take their responsibility a little more seriously than others do but each is responsible, under the Rules, for laying down the conditions under which the competition is to be played. The committee is also responsible for settling disputes, defining the boundaries of the course and the margins of the hazards, suspending or canceling play due to inclement weather and announcing the starting times and pairings.

The committee does not have the authority to waive a rule of golf, but they do have the power to make and the responsibility to publish any *local rules*.

Some local rules are used so often that we often mistakenly think of them as Rules of Golf. For example, the local rule granting relief for an embedded ball *through the green* and the local rule defining areas such as turf nurseries and newly planted trees as *ground under repair* are good examples. It is important to remember that these are *not* Rules of Golf but rather conditions used at the discretion of the committee.

Other local rules are rarely, if ever, used at the club level but, because they are always in effect for PGA Tour events,

they tend to cause confusion. For instance, the Tours have used local rules prohibiting a player from changing the type of ball he is playing during a round (the “one-ball rule”) and, at one time, required a player to use a small coin placed directly behind his ball when marking the position of his ball. Another local rule prohibits practice putting or chipping on or near the putting green of the hole last played.

Lacking these local rules, you and I are free to change from one brand, compression or type of ball to another between holes as many times as we wish; mark the position of our ball with a tee (or even the toe of our putter) and, as long as we do not delay play, we can practice putting after holing out.

A while back, the USGA/R&A approved language for a local rule giving the *Committee* the authority to allow the use of electronic measuring devices, and another to treat stones in bunkers as movable obstructions and to grant line-of-play relief from fixed sprinkler caps (when the cap is located within two club lengths of the green and your ball lies within two club lengths of the cap).

Don't be caught unaware. Always carry a Rules book in your bag, and check for any local rules in effect at the course you play.



## PART TWO

### *From Tee to Green*

#### **Begin at the Beginning**

**P**GA PROFESSIONALS OFTEN REMIND US OF THE VALUE of a pre-shot routine—and they're right. A pre-round routine wouldn't hurt either because, in addition to the nervous jokes and last-second swing search, some say the first tee is where matches are often won or lost!

It's also where the game begins, and it's where you should take time to organize your thoughts and check your equipment as you prepare to do battle.

Before stepping onto the tee, count your clubs, because once you've put a ball into play you'll earn a penalty if it turns out you began play with more than 14 clubs. The penalty? You must adjust the status of a match by deducting one hole for each hole on which you were in violation of Rule 4-4 (up to a maximum of two holes).

In stroke play, you are penalized two strokes for every hole you play with too many clubs, up to a maximum of four strokes, and the penalty should be assessed by adding two strokes to your score for each of the first two holes. The penalty for carrying too many clubs is heavy. So, count carefully. It can happen, as it did, to Ian Woosman at the British Open!

Once you've discovered you started the round with more than 14 clubs, you must immediately reduce your arsenal to 14. Don't make the mistake of continuing play with the excess clubs under the logic that you were already assessed the maximum penalty! If you did continue play, without taking the excess club(s) out of play, you would be disqualified! By the way, you can take the extra club out of play by simply identifying the excess club—and not using it again. You do not need to physically abandon the club or break it into pieces!

Before your first tee shot you should also put a distinguishing mark on your ball. Even if the rest of your group plays different brands and numbers, if any situation arises in which you can't positively identify a ball as your own, you are deemed to have lost your ball! Marking your ball also lowers the risk of hitting a wrong ball, or another golfer accidentally hitting your ball.

This is also the time to convert your Handicap Index to a Course Handicap for the course and tees you're about to play. If you carelessly declare a course handicap higher than you are entitled to, the penalty is disqualification.

When it is your turn to play, remember that the teeing ground is a rectangular area that extends two club-lengths back from the outside, front edge of the tee-markers. Your ball must be played from this area, but there is no requirement that you take your stance within this *teeing ground*. Please note that despite the popularity of the expression "tee-box," the correct term is "teeing ground": you won't find tee-box in the Rules book.

Interestingly, tee-markers, on the hole you are playing, have a kind of chameleon-like quality to them. Until you put a ball into play they're deemed to be fixed and may not be moved. But if you hit a wild tee shot or flub one so badly that it comes to rest where any tee-marker interferes with your lie, stance, line of play or area of intended swing, you are free to move the marker. Just be sure to return the tee-marker to its original position after you play.

As play begins, the *honor* or *order of play*, as described earlier, is determined by lot, unless pairings have been

announced, which would mean that the side listed first has the honor. The honor on subsequent holes goes to the side that won the preceding hole. If the hole was halved, the side that had the honor on the preceding tee retains it. If the net score on the hole determines the result, then it is the net score that determines the honor.

In stroke play, there's no penalty for playing out of order unless the committee determines that players agreed to do so to give one or both of them an advantage. All players party to such an agreement would be disqualified! In match play there is no penalty, but a player may immediately require his opponent to cancel his stroke and play again, in the correct order.

Arriving at the *starting point* late will cost you. In most cases, the starting point is the first tee, but there are occasions when you might be assigned to start on number 10 for a two-tee start or some other hole for a "shotgun start." If you miss your time, but do manage to get to the tee within five minutes of your assigned time, the penalty, in stroke play, is two strokes. In match play, you've lost the first hole. If you arrive more than five minutes after your assigned time, the penalty is disqualification, in both stroke play and match play.

In four-ball play, a side can proceed, without penalty, even if one of the partners is missing. The latecomer can join the match—but only between holes. You may want to remind him to set the alarm for the next time he's your partner!



### Addressing the Ball

How many remember the *Honeymooners* classic when Ed Norton helped Ralph Kramden learn the game overnight so that the big-mouth could keep a golf game with his boss.

Conducted in Ralph's tiny kitchen, but only after the purchase of a gaudy golf outfit, the first lesson began at the tee. "Address the ball," Norton directed and Ralph's historic response: "Hello, ball!"

Ralph's outing was a predictable disaster, but you can avoid needless penalties by knowing the dos and don'ts associated with addressing the ball.

A player has *addressed the ball* once he has grounded his club—either immediately in front of or immediately behind his ball. It is important to understand exactly when you have addressed the ball. Once a ball *in play* is addressed, you will incur a penalty stroke and be required to replace the ball if

the ball moves for *any* reason—unless it is “known” or “virtually certain” that the player did not cause the ball to move (Rule 18-2b). However, on the teeing ground, there is no penalty if a ball moves inadvertently at address.

Despite Norton’s directive, there is no requirement that a player address the ball prior to taking a stroke. In fact, many great players avoid grounding their club prior to the stroke and therefore never address their ball. All-time great Jack Nicklaus held his club just off the ground as he prepared to play a stroke. I’ve heard golfers say that by following this procedure Jack eliminates the possibility of a penalty should his ball move before he played. This is *close* to true. But consider this question submitted to the USGA: “A player took several practice swings about one foot from his ball and his club came in contact with the ground. He then took his stance, touched the light rough behind the ball with his clubhead but did not ground the club. At that point the ball moved.”

The player claimed that no penalty was incurred, because he had not addressed the ball. However, the Committee judged that the practice swings and the touching of the grass behind the ball may have caused the ball to move, and



therefore the player incurred a penalty stroke under Rule 18-2a. Was the committee correct?”

The USGA (Decision 18-2a/30) explained that it is a question of fact whether the player caused his ball to move. If he did, he would incur a penalty under Rule 18-2a (Ball Moved by Player, Partner, Caddie or Equipment). At times, though, there is a *presumption of guilt* and the USGA reasoned that because of the practice swings and touching of the grass, the weight of evidence is against the player and concluded that the player had caused his ball to move and therefore upheld the committee’s decision.

When a ball in play *moves*, the player will not be excused from penalty simply because he has not addressed his ball and, therefore, must exercise caution whenever he (or his caddie or partner) is in the vicinity of his ball. Players should take extra care when their ball comes to rest in a heavily wooded area, thick rough or a dry water hazard. A player who approaches his ball, even without a club, even to identify his ball or to determine how he wishes to play his next shot, would be subject to penalty if he caused the ball to move. Remember that there may be a *presumption of guilt* if your ball moves and you’ve been anywhere near it, so be very careful

every time you approach your ball and take your stance. The fact that you have not addressed the ball may relieve you of penalty under 18-2b, but your very presence in the vicinity of your ball might be deemed to have caused the ball to move and lead to a penalty under Rule 18-2a.



### **What's a Backswing; What's a Stroke?**

Talk to any golf professional about the importance of a smooth, one-piece backswing and he'll talk chapter and verse. Read the *Rules of Golf* and you'll find that a *stroke* is the *forward* movement of the club made with the *intention* of fairly striking at and moving the ball. In other words, according to the USGA, the backswing is *not* a part of a stroke!

On those few occasions when your ball is inside the margin of a water hazard, but still playable, it is not unusual to find loose impediments in the proximity of the ball. And, while you are not permitted to move or touch a loose impediment when your ball and the loose impediment are both in the hazard, it might be possible to play a stroke despite some interference with loose impediments. When you understand that there is NO penalty if you touch or move a loose impediment *during*